

# FAITH AND CERTAINTY

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C. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN

Emory Evlander

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of several loops and a long, sweeping diagonal stroke that extends from the top left towards the bottom right, crossing the label.

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**Skovgaard-Petersen, Carl Axel, 1866-**

Faith and certainty



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# FAITH AND CERTAINTY

BY

C. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH

BY

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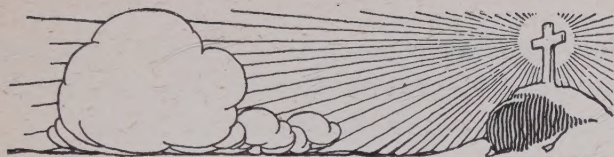


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Book for Children

**F**AITH and certainty are one and the same. Faith is "a firm conviction"\* (Hebr. 11: 1); and a firm conviction is certainty.

This needs to be strongly emphasized in our day. For a firm conviction is rapidly becoming something uncommon. The world is full of people who are able to reason about every possible moral system without having any of their own. They know everything and believe nothing. The head's knowledge has swallowed up the heart's certainty. This is a vital defect inherent in nearly all modern spiritual life; but here, as often happens, men attempt to remedy the defect by transforming the fault

\* Danish translation.

into an ideal. Conscious of the want of conviction, they make it their ideal to be without conviction, or as a poet has put it — to be:

“A naked soul that’s swimming  
In Thought’s torrential flood.”

To disport oneself, spiritually naked, in the cross-currents of all the world’s contradictory thoughts; without prejudice, but also without personal devotion to delve into and sport with all that former generations with unyielding earnestness have subsisted on — this is in our day considered distinctly liberal and modern. And while they are thus tossed about and carried away by the torrent, they find it a merry pastime to scoff at those who stand on the Rock of Ages.

The certainty of faith in others is called by these imagination, hypocrisy or retrogression.

To these “naked souls” I have not much to say. Faith is a mystery; and one of the mysteries in Christian life is the certainty of faith. Not for all the gold of Ophir would it be possible for me to explain the certainty of faith to him whose *conscious* ideal it is to keep himself free from conviction. To these I can only testify from faith’s certainty within me that no

human soul was ever created to live in "Thought's torrential flood." True, a human soul may in its search for truth fall into this swirling flood, and fortunate, then, is he who makes an honest fight to keep his head above the water and to struggle back to the Rock again! But if instead of struggling out of the flood he feels at home in its eddies and takes pleasure in the lure of the sport — then he will find not life in "Thought's torrential flood," but death in its depths. The naked swimmer then becomes a drifting corpse.

Convictionless reasoning is begotten of death and leads to death, — but *faith is a firm conviction.*

This truth must be emphasized in opposition not only to "the naked souls," but also to mere nominal Christians.

If the world is full of convictionless doubters, it is equally true that the Church is full of convictionless "Christians." As if there were a command from God that we should believe as those who believe not! No, *weep* we should as those who weep not, and rejoice as those who rejoice not (1 Cor. 7: 30), — but we should certainly not believe as those who believe not!

Yet there are many in Christendom who do so.

Until several years ago it was common practice at a church in Mid-Jutland for the people to bow reverently toward the left when they came in through the church door. Then there came a new pastor to that church. He noticed the practice and asked for an explanation. He asked the young people, but they could assign no other reason than that they had seen their elders do so. He asked the old people; they had never reflected about the matter — they only knew that it was the proper thing to do. He asked the parish clerk, and he knew no more about it than the others. All bowed reverently, but none knew why. Some years later the church was repaired and redecorated. Then the riddle was solved. When the coat of plaster was removed, the workmen found to the left of the church door an old, well-preserved fresco painting of the Madonna and the Child. Here, then, was the explanation. Ever since the days before the Reformation people had bowed before the picture of the Madonna. At a later day the painting had been covered over with a coat of plaster and had fallen into oblivion. But all kept up the practice of bowing, though no one any longer knew why.

Dare we deny that the Christianity of many people is of the same caliber? They bow in faith but do not know definitely why. They have themselves never discovered, nor seen the truth before which they bow.

It is these numerous marionette Christians who to a certain extent justify the "naked souls" in their contempt of the certainty of faith. The naked souls do not know — or do not wish to know — that the "faith" of these marionette Christians is just as far from being *faith* as their own glorified skepticism.

To these marionette Christians also I have not much to say; — only this, that I am almost tempted to wish them a real plunge into "Thought's torrential flood." For such a purpose the swirling flood is beneficial, namely, as a means to rouse from sleep, but not as a place in which to live.

But midway between the scornful skepticism of the naked souls and the somnambulistic faith of sleeping Christians I hear voices of different import. "Tell us," they whisper, "is faith in reality a certainty? We have so often heard that assertion made, but we have never understood it. How can we obtain certainty con-

cerning the invisible; certainty concerning our eternal salvation; certainty concerning events that took place thousands of years ago, or that will only reach their fulfillment on the threshold of eternity? *That* is to us the great enigma! We understand the value of faith, and in the midst of doubts we yearn for certainty; — but how shall we *arrive* at certainty? Help us in this, if you can help us at all!"

Such voices have formerly whispered in my own breast. Such voices have time and again reached me, when soul communed with soul concerning the deepest questions of life. *Such* voices are worthy of an answer.

With God's help I will now attempt to answer them.

*First of all I wish to establish with somewhat greater definiteness that faith actually is and must be certainty.*

How is it possible that God who is love could wish to grant us less than certainty concerning our eternal salvation; and how is it possible that a soul, confronted by the alternative of eternal salvation or eternal damnation, could be satisfied with less than certainty? That would be unthinkable.

The Scriptures also everywhere define faith as a firm conviction. There is nothing in the Scriptures that points in the opposite direction — not even (as I myself once thought) the great judgment scene in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel. There, as you know, *Matt 25* we read that the Lord on the last day shall say to those on His right hand: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" And to those on His left hand: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels!" Then according to Jesus' own account, the strange thing will happen that *all*, both the saved and the damned, will be just as amazed at the verdict of the judge. The damned exclaim: "Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" The saved utter in substance the same words with the slight but important omission of the word "not."

Where here is there any trace of "the firm conviction"? The saved seem to have just as little certainty of their salvation as the damned of their damnation. The verdict seems to take them all aback.

But mark, it only *seems* to do so.

The lost well knew that they would be lost. The eternal fire to which the Lord consigns them was in one sense nothing new to them. It had been burning for a long time in their conscience. They knew very well that they were without peace and without God. Therefore, when they say: "Lord, when saw we thee in need, and did not minister unto thee?" they do so to exculpate themselves. They lie to themselves. Their words are a final revelation of that lifelong false security wherein they had lulled themselves to sleep. They had often felt the fire burning in their conscience, and hence had formed the habit of fleeing from their conscience. It had become natural for them to lie to themselves *concerning* themselves. It is this deep-rooted falsehood in their lives that on the Judgment Day vainly tries by feigned innocence to escape judgment.

In this connection, however, those on the left hand are of less interest to us. For, as you know, we are discussing the *certainty of salvation*, and this certainty can come in question only in the case of those on the right hand. Were they then certain of their salvation? If so, why do they also exclaim in amazement:

“Lord, when saw we thee in need and ministered unto thee?” In their case the cry can not be a mere routine-like expression of a deep-rooted falsehood in their lives. No! With them it is humility’s unconsciousness of its own worth. They are surprised, *not* because they are saved, but because Jesus says: “You are saved because of all that you have done in my name.” That they are “the blessed of my Father” is nothing new to them at all. The Father’s blessing had long constituted the happiness of their lives. Therefore they also knew with full certainty that they would inherit the kingdom. But they *are* surprised at the reasons assigned for the verdict. They fail to understand that they are saved because they had in faith practiced love toward Jesus. This sounds so new and strange to them. They have always had the eye of faith steadily fixed on God’s free grace alone in Christ Jesus. It had never occurred to them that they themselves through the power of this grace had grown rich in ministering love. Their left hand had had no knowledge of the good their right hand had done!

This humility’s unconsciousness of its own worth is so far from being a lack of the cer-

tainty of salvation that, on the contrary, it is the fruit of a sure and living faith.

There is absolutely nothing in Christ's powerful description of the judgment day that denies that faith is certainty; and, on the whole, there is nothing in all Scriptures that denies it. Nowhere is faith described as a reasonable or probable assumption; everywhere it is represented as a full and firm certainty, — but mark well: a certainty that has several different stages and degrees.

This last must not be forgotten.

In the great discussion concerning Christian certainty there would have been considerably less of groping, tears, sins, and disputes, provided the different degrees of Christian certainty had been more sharply defined. Many a smoking flax has been quenched because, without more ado, believers have made certainty the condition for salvation.

It has happened more than once that some trembling soul has ventured near to the gates of heaven. There he has encountered a believer who has addressed him about as follows: "If you are not certain that you are saved, you will be damned." And the trembling soul was *not* certain. Again the believer emphasized the

necessity of certainty — and the result was that the trembling soul was barred from the gates of heaven by this idle prattle concerning certainty, instead of being aided across the threshold of heaven's portals.

Was the believer, then, in the wrong?

O no, not altogether.

But the seeker — was it wrong of him to flee in terror?

Not so! How could he possibly do otherwise! He had, as we know, no certainty and, therefore, no right to the kingdom of heaven.

The mistake must be sought elsewhere. They worded of certainty without making it clear to each other what certainty is. They had no eye for the stages and degrees of certainty, and without this they could neither find the way to certainty nor comprehend its inmost nature.

We may distinguish three main stages or degrees in Christian certainty — let us call them:

|                                                                            |                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Certainty based on the "Word" alone;</i>                                | } 3 stages<br>of<br>Certainty |
| <i>Certainty based on the Word and partially confirmed by experience;</i>  |                               |
| <i>Certainty based on the Word and actualized by complete fulfillment.</i> |                               |

The certainty of faith which we are dealing with, is, as to its contents, not a certainty concerning a number of general religious truths, but a personal certainty of salvation — a certainty, even in the midst of all the sin and death in the world, of being a saved and ransomed soul for Christ's sake; — a certainty, in the fellowship of the Spirit, of having forgiveness of sins, the name and privileges of a child of God, free access to the throne of grace, citizenship in heaven, victory in life and death, hope of life eternal, and eternal glory with God in the heavenly home above. Such is the certainty of faith that is ours! Praise be to God who has granted us things so great!

But just at this point there are many who contend that in order to be assured of these great blessings, some great and blissful experience must at least be felt in the very depths of the soul; and so, consciously or unconsciously, they live in momentary expectation that these great experiences, these blissful emotions shall descend from heaven upon them in some marvelous and inexplicable manner.

They may go and wait for this till the end of time. Such blissful experiences may indeed come in due time, but it is not with these that

the beginning is made. One must *first* believe before one can have the experiences of faith. That ought to be self-evident.

On the other hand, blind faith is an impossibility: there must be *something* that comes before it in time. But this "something" does *not* consist in sweet emotions and heavenly transports, for all these are (in the measure that they commonly fall to man's lot here on earth) the fruits and results of faith — not its foundation. That which comes before faith and impels to faith is simply God's Word.

For God's Word clearly proffers to us that which is comprehended in our certainty of salvation, namely, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. First of all, therefore, it is necessary to come in personal contact with the Word of God.

The first certainty of faith, or rather, the certainty of faith in its first stage, is never a certainty based upon personal experience of salvation, but a certainty based on the proffer of salvation contained in the Word.

What, then, assures me of the truth of this proffer; or, more precisely stated, how am I to become certain that "the Word" actually is God's word, and hence true and trustworthy;

and, further, how am I to become certain that the proffers of salvation contained in the Word are intended for *me*? For, naturally, there can be no question of certainty in trusting to the Word, unless I am certain in both these matters: certain of the Word's divine authority, and certain of personal participation in the Word's proffers of grace. In practice, a clear distinction is seldom made between these two things. Some individuals find it more difficult to become convinced of the Word's divine origin. If that is fully established, then the certainty of personal participation in the Word's proffered salvation follows almost as a matter of course. Other individuals find it more difficult to become convinced of their personal participation in salvation, while, on the other hand, the certainty of the Word's divine origin has crept into their souls, they know not when nor how. The question, however, has these two sides, and both sides must therefore be elucidated.

*What, then, convinces me of the Word's divine authority?*

The answer is: *Simply the Word itself.* To know the Word and to be certain of its divine origin are one and the same thing.

But what is it, then, to know the Word?

Christ says: "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." *This* is true of the Word in all the Holy Scriptures. The Word is spirit and life. To know the Word is to know the Spirit in the Word.

But only the spirit in man, that is, the inmost and deepest promptings in man's conscience can find the Spirit in the Word. If we read the Word with the head alone, we never learn to "know" the Word; we penetrate no further than to the outward letter of the Word. But if we read the Word with an awakened conscience, then we learn to know the Word, for then we reach the Spirit in the Word. And at the very moment when the spirit in ourselves comes in contact with the Spirit in the Word, our entire soul is flooded by the light of truth radiating from the Word. In the most elemental and direct manner we then become convinced of the Word's divine origin, even though, perchance, we are far from able, as yet, to analyze with logical accuracy the concept and extent of the Word's divine nature, and are also far from having tasted the sweetness of the saving promises contained in the Word.

Consequently, it is not by extensive specula-

tion or many proofs that we become convinced of the Word's divine origin, but simply by spiritual contact with the Spirit in the Word. So it is. And so it has always been.

When Jesus on one occasion had spoken the word, we recall how the people exclaimed that he taught them as one having authority. These people would hardly have been able to present an acceptable and binding proof of the authority of Jesus, nor to give an accurate definition of it. To them it was simply an experience of a most personal nature. The spirit within them had been in contact with the Spirit in the words of Jesus, and the result was an irrepressible impression of the Word's power and authority. — We must go the same way. Proofs are of little value. Let but spirit touch Spirit, and proofs become unnecessary.

By this, however, we have not said that, to a certain extent, proofs can not be found. For even strong proofs can be found. Nay, I venture to say that, rightly considered, *everything* in the world proves the truth and divine origin of God's Word.

*Nature* proves the Word's divine authority, for from the story of creation down to the present time the Word has supplied the eternally

valid points of view for a proper conception of nature and its laws — points of view which all the culture and science up to the present time have confirmed. The Word shows that nature is a development with periods of transition to new creative forces; that nature serves man in proportion as man serves God; that nature, as originally planned, was “very good,” but that it was afterwards so ruined and destroyed that it now is a composite of warring forces from the midst of which there arises a yearning cry for deliverance from “the bondage of corruption.” All this is in full harmony with the experiences of all ages and with modern scientific development. Prior to *all* science, the *Word* possessed the whole truth’s clear-sightedness regarding nature, and this, simply because the Word emanates from nature’s God.

*The human heart* confirms the Word’s divine authority. For the Word declares, as we know, that of itself the human heart can not comprehend itself. The God alone, who shaped the mountains and created the winds, can reveal to man man’s own thoughts. How well this agrees with all human experience! Has not the human heart lost the key to its inmost secret chamber? Does it not stand just as irresolute before its

own deepest longings as before its inmost conflicts? Does it not feel itself out of poise, encompassed, as it is, on all sides by sealed mysteries, because its own inmost secret chamber is sealed until God's Word breaks the seals and by a few simple words teaches man to comprehend himself? — "You are created unto God; you have fallen away from God; through Christ Jesus you can be brought back to God." Thus the Word speaks; thus is the mystery solved. All the warring forces in the human heart, and all the sealed mysteries in human life become clear and comprehensible in *that* light. The Word solves the mysteries of the heart, because the Word issues from Him "that searcheth the heart."

*Likewise the history of former times and all the world's literature* confirm the Word's divine authority. Again and again the Word lays claim to be something unique among the things under heaven and on earth. The people of the present day have within their grasp the means of testing and verifying this claim; for the myths, sagas, laws, and sacred writings of all nations lie open and revealed to us. Confidently you may place all these side by side with the Bible, well knowing that the Word will be able to

prove that it is unique, unequaled. — The salvation is unique that is pictured in the Word; the wisdom is unique that characterizes the divine law; the outlook into the future is unique that meets us in the prophecies; and above all, the way of salvation is unique that lies revealed through faith in the mystery of the cross. Indeed, at the very points where the religions and literatures of mankind present approximate parallels, there the Word's uniqueness becomes the most strikingly apparent. Let him who so wishes put this to the test! — But if its character is unique, so also is its source. The Word is "from above," all else is "from beneath."

*The history of the Church* also confirms the Word's divine authority; for the Word declares that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" against the Church of God. What more descriptive motto can be prefixed to the history of the Church through two thousand years of achievement!

*Foreign missions* also confirm the Word's divine authority; for the Word bears witness that Christ is the goal for which humanity yearns, and mark how this is verified among the peoples from farthest East to distant West!

*The world's opposition* confirms the Word's

divine authority; for the Word has clearly foretold that opposition would manifest itself, and that the gospel would be "to them that perish foolishness," and mark how manifestly even in our day the curse of perdition rests on those who knowingly resist the cross. Conscious and deliberate unbelief has always resulted in untr tranquil hearts and moral corruption.

*The history of civilization* confirms the Word's divine authority; for the Word has sketched the outlines of the world's cultural development both in the Old Testament prophecies and in Christ's teachings concerning the last days, as well as in the book of Revelation. Incontrovertibly, history is shaping itself according to the plan presented to us by the Word in bold, clear-cut outlines thousands of years ago. But that which possesses such foreknowledge of history must of necessity originate from the Lord of all history.

And yet, why attempt to enumerate all the proofs! They are without number and without end. *Everything* in the world confirms the Word's divine authority and origin — *but most of all the Word itself.*

The Word of God contains *within* itself the best testimony of itself. He who has knowledge

of the Word and refuses to believe that it is God's Word, must by all the rules of the purest logic fall into the most paradoxical absurdities. For if the Word is not of God, it follows of itself that the Word, which has uttered the highest and deepest truths in all the world, must itself rest upon a falsehood basic in its nature. Is that historically possible? Is that psychologically thinkable? Is that logically reasonable? Could falsehood produce a book, the genesis of which is the work of centuries, but which, nevertheless, strikingly manifests a continuity of development where the same truths continually meet us in ever fuller maturity from sprout and bud to flower and fruit? No, such are not the fruits of falsehood!

But after all, of what avail are proofs? It is by no means these proofs that first of all are to convince the seeking soul of the Word's divine authority. Spirit must touch spirit, otherwise mountains of proofs are useless. The proof of proofs is ever this: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" *That* and nothing else. Without a quickened conscience it is impossible to obtain certainty of the gospel's divine authority and, consequently, certainty of salvation. But where a quickened conscience encounters and

embraces the Word, there is born, even without proofs, that certainty of the Word's divine authority which is the prime source of all personal certainty of salvation.

Certainty of the Word's divine authority is, however, not the same thing as certainty of salvation. The certainty of salvation further implies certainty of personal participation in the promises of grace contained in the Word. But here a difficulty arises. A quickened conscience is, as we have seen, a prerequisite for certainty of the Word's divine authority, but at the same time it seems to be a hindrance to certainty of personal participation in salvation. For a quickened conscience is a stubborn accuser. In all the world there is no one who feels himself so depraved and lost as the one whose conscience has been stirred and quickened. Of all created things in the world from the smallest insect to the holy angels of God, there is nothing so utterly wretched as the soul who is beginning to know itself. At one time such a soul is filled with inconsolable contrition accompanied by many tears; at another time by cold despair without tears. And if the many tears cause bitter pain, then the despair that banishes tears

begets pain no less severe. On the whole, I know of no greater suffering on earth than to be burdened with a guilty conscience concealed under a sluggish indifference that prevents the conscience from voicing its anguish. Then, after a few vain efforts to burst the shell of sluggishness, the conscience at last withdraws into some nook or cranny of the soul to sob out its anguish.

More than ever does a soul in *that* state need a Saviour; and yet least of all dare it then believe in salvation — so worthless, so sinful, so unclean as it is!

*It appears, then, that the same quickened conscience which spontaneously assures me of the Word's divine trustworthiness, at the same time hopelessly excludes me from the glory of salvation.* Here it is that the workings of conscience tie a knot, which we must not, through lack of judgment, draw still tighter. But, unfortunately, that is just what so many do. It happens somewhat as the prophet says: "The children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth." The aforementioned anguish of conscience is the very birth travail of certainty, but all too often strength is lacking to bring forth. Instead of a triumphant cer-

tainty, we obtain only a stillborn longing that merely serves to bring faith into discredit.

The anguish of conscience is certainty's hour of travail, but *strength is needed to give birth*. And no one need be without this strength, if he will only honestly open his eyes and examine what God's Word really says:

"Hear the word of Jehovah, ye that tremble at his word!" (Isaiah 66:5.)

To whom does God's Word proffer grace?

To those free from sin, the undefiled? No. — To the self-reliant and conceited? No. — To the exalted and inspired? No. — To those who have a full measure of good works and blissful feelings? Again, No! — The super-scription on the letter of grace is quite a different one: There it is plainly written: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Who are, then, the blessed and the saved among the children of men?

"The poor in spirit."

Who possess the kingdom of God, and, with it, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation with God?

"The poor in spirit."

How, then, may we assure ourselves that the kingdom of heaven is ours?

By assuring ourselves that we are really poor in spirit. And to *this end* a quickened conscience is not a hindrance, but an aid. The one whose conscience is quickened may doubt *all* else, but this he cannot doubt, that he is, indeed, poor in spirit, and it is just this one thing that decides the matter. For it is this that grants him a right and a worthiness to the kingdom of God for Christ's sake! Here neither objection nor irresolution is of any avail; here the only resort is to bow submissively to the truth. Nevertheless, it is just on this point that many a soul becomes entangled in scruples of all kinds. "It seems to me," says one, "that it would be strange, untrue, and indolent of me to yield to the belief that I am saved and blessed just as I am; for I do not in the least *feel* that this is true."

That may be so. But one thing you *do feel*. You feel poor in spirit, or at least you know in your conscience that this is the case. See to it, then, that you do not despise God's comforting promise, namely, that on this poverty in the spirit all depends.

"But I fear," says another, "that I have not repented sufficiently."

Even that objection carries no weight; for what does this fear of yours imply? Simply this, that you feel yourself poor even in your capacity for repentance. Consequently, this is but another evidence of the fact that you are poor in spirit.

"But," declares a third, "I have never really wept over my sins; I have never felt myself utterly crushed under the weight of my guilt as so many others have."

Grant that this is so. But neither does this in itself lessen your poverty in the spirit. On the contrary; truly poor is he alone, who knows himself poor in spirit and yet does not even possess the tears to weep over his poverty.

"But listen!" cries a fourth, "sometimes I have rather high opinions of myself, and that must be an indication that I am not sufficiently poor in spirit to appropriate to myself the promise of the kingdom of God."

Not even such reasoning is correct. Nay, it may just as well prove the very opposite. For even high opinions of oneself may be an evidence of poverty in the spirit, provided your soul sits in judgment over itself for entertaining such opinions.

A quickened conscience cannot possibly escape this poverty in the spirit. All its anxious objections transform themselves to new evidences of poverty in the spirit; and by this means is laid the sure foundation for the certainty of salvation itself. For that is the "foolishness of God" which is wiser than the wisdom of men, that God in His Word turns to the poor in spirit and says to him: "Blessed art thou; the kingdom of heaven is thine!" What matters it then if to *me* that word seems unreasonable, that I, the poor in spirit, am blessed in the very midst of my poverty? Does not the Word possess divine authority? For has not my quickened conscience convinced me of this? There remains, then, nothing for me to do but to admit the authority of the Word even in this matter, and despite the varying feelings and accusations of my own heart, to trust implicitly in the Word and thank God for His incomprehensible, boundless grace, even if, as yet, I have never tasted in the smallest measure the sweetness and the power of this grace.

*The certainty of salvation in its lowest stage rests, therefore, on a compulsion of conscience with respect to the Word.*

Conscience compels me to admit my poverty in the spirit; and when a deep and abiding sense of this poverty drives me to the brink of despair concerning my salvation and eternal happiness, then the same quickened conscience again compels me to bow in submission to the Word's divine authority, and to believe that God's saving grace is mine, however strange this may seem to me.

This conflict within the soul is unique and unparalleled. The apprehension on the part of conscience of the Word's divine authority triumphs over the condemnation pronounced by the selfsame conscience. This, on the whole, is the firmest foundation for certainty that can be conceived of here on earth. For no certainty on earth is greater than that which is based on the compulsion of conscience; and never is this compulsion of conscience greater than when it compels me to act directly contrary to its own accusations. Surely, it requires less compulsion of conscience to contend with all the world, than to carry on a warfare of this kind against your very self! Let the "naked souls" boast of their skill to welter in "Thought's torrential flood." Here is to be found a torrent whose swirling waters are more tempestuous than any

in all the world. But he who ventures out upon *it*, is carried, not down into the depths, but up on the Rock.

I trust now that it is clear to you how absurd is the wisdom of the wise who say: "We will not believe in saving grace until we have experienced it."

*This is absurd*; in the first place, because the experiencing of God's grace can only be a fruit of faith; and in the second place, because, before the coming of faith, there are other experiences which in themselves are sufficient to bring us to faith. By this means, to be sure, faith may at first appear to be a rash venture, a leap in the dark; but if so, it is a venture induced by experiences that the lover of truth cannot escape, namely, experiences of one's own poverty in the spirit, and of the Word's divine authority. The certainty of faith based on the Word depends on the continuity of these two experiences.

My poverty in the spirit takes me by the one hand; my implicit certainty of the truth of the Scriptures takes me by the other hand, and God's promises cry, "Leap!" And so it comes about that I venture the mighty leap out into

the fathomless depths of grace! I believe in grace, I am thankful for grace, and I am certain of my salvation without once having felt, or tasted, or even observed in myself the slightest trace of salvation.

Certainty in this stage is in the fullest measure: "a firm conviction of *things not seen*" (Hebr. 11: 1). Never forget, however, that it is a firm conviction! For "Though the earth do change, and though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas," yet will that firm conviction never be shaken which, resting on the Word alone, declares: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise! My conscience constrains me!"

*The first stage of certainty is, however, only a transition stage.*

*He who has ventured the leap out into the depths of grace will soon learn that these depths "bear up." He who by compulsion of conscience has laid hold on the Word, will soon in peace of conscience experience the Word's power.*

All this is perfectly simple and natural.

When I believe the word that I, though poor in spirit, nevertheless possess the kingdom of

heaven, I cannot refrain from magnifying, praising, and thanking God for His unspeakable gift; and before I am aware of it, the joy of salvation fills my poor heart.

When I believe the word, that in Christ I am a child of God, it becomes an urgent necessity for me to live daily near to God; and where God is near, the devil must flee, and sin loses its power.

When I believe the word concerning grace, I have in this faith daily access to the Throne of Grace; and from this Throne of Grace precious and wonderful experiences begin to enter into my life. Prayer manifests its efficacy, and God's promises prove their truth.

All these experiences, and many others of similar nature, serve to corroborate the fact that the personal appropriation of the promises of grace was, indeed, a bold venture, but a venture of such a kind that nothing was imperiled, but all was gained.

Naturally, this personal experience and corroboration of the Word's truth and power may manifest themselves in many different ways and in various degrees of intensity. They may come as heavenly ecstasies welling forth a rushing flood of "the powers of the age to come;"

they may also come as the gentle dew of Lebanon or as the wind's soft sighing from the everlasting hills. They may appear as a buoyant renewing of the will — as if in the strength of the Lord our God we could leap over mountains. They may also manifest themselves as a secret well-being of the soul — as if we had emerged cleansed from a rejuvenating bath! And very often a personal experience of God's grace assumes the character of a happy encounter between the soul and its own prayers. The prayers that we, relying on the Word alone, have long been sending up to the Throne of Grace, those prayers sooner or later return to us in festive garb, fulfilled and actualized in our every-day life. We taste and see that the Lord is good, and that He, "who seeth in secret," does, indeed, recompense openly.

In manifold ways God grants sweet experiences of His grace to those who believe the Word of grace. When the gospel of Christ is only accepted by faith, it always proves itself efficient, true and living, able to redeem what it promises.

Very properly, therefore, did the prophets of old liken Christian experience to a sunrise; for the sun never fails to rise when its hour has

come. "But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings" (Mal. 4: 2). "His going forth is sure as the morning" (Hos. 6: 3).

*It is at this point, then, that we advance to the second stage of the certainty of faith: a certainty based in part upon a personal experience of the saving power of the Word.*

At this stage it is possible to join in the words of the Samaritans: "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (John 4: 42). Or as Luther has in one place expressed it: "When I know and confess Jesus Christ as my Lord and God, I have this certainty not only from the assurance of the Scriptures, but also because of many and varied trying experiences. For the name of Jesus has often come to my aid when no living creature could have helped me. I now, therefore, have both the Scriptures and experience to rest upon. God has given me both in rich measure; but they have cost me cruelly much."

This certainty based on experience is a foretaste of "the glory which shall be revealed;" "the riches of the full assurance of understand-

ing” of which the Scriptures speak, — in contradistinction to *that* certainty which is only “a firm conviction of *things not seen.*”

*But let it not be understood by this, that “the certainty based on experience” makes superfluous “the certainty based on the Word.” For such is not the case.*

In the first place we already know that “the certainty based on the Word” forms the firm foundation for a personal experience of the Word’s truth. Day after day in a believer’s life with God he finds it repeated that only when he wholly and unconditionally believes the Word for the sake of the Word’s own truth — only then does he experience anew the Word’s power — whether that Word is the great, all-inclusive promise to the poor in spirit that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” or whether the Word is some special promise of special help in the varied circumstances of temporal life. The certainty based on the Word is always, therefore, the soil out of which sprouts the certainty based on experience.

In the second place, it must be emphasized that the certainty based on experience never here on earth attains to more than a partial development. At times the inner experiences

of the sweetness of God's grace may even be lost or altogether fail to present themselves. The sweet experiences and all other palpable evidences of the riches of God's saving grace often "play a desperate game" with the human soul. They shoot forth, they blossom and exhale fragrance, and our soul rejoices in God. But "the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more!" And yet these experiences come from a faithful and truthful God! Why are they so capricious and unstable, as though they were begotten of the flesh?

Humanly speaking, there are many reasons for this. Sins and shortcomings, no doubt, have their share in the blame. How can the sweet peace of God be expected to abide in our hearts, if we ourselves do not abide with God? — Or the fault may be our own shortsightedness: We may *think* that the Word is not being fulfilled as it should, though all the while its promises are coming true right before our eyes. Then again, the fault may lie in the very nature of our own sweet experiences. When fire burns it produces ashes, and ashes tend to smother fire. In the same way, every pleasant experience in this world of corruption has a tendency to repress and quench itself.

For these and other reasons the experience of God's grace is unstable and changeable, although with God there is "no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." But there are days in the life of every believer when the "sweet experience" of peace and joy from above again shakes off the dust of its feet and departs from the confines of the soul. "The bridegroom shall be taken away from them." Then loneliness becomes our guest and bereavement our comforter.

What then? Does our certainty of faith fail us?

Often, but not *necessarily* so. At such times we must again descend to the first and lowest stage of the certainty of faith: faith based on the Word alone. Experiences vary, but the Word is steadfast. If up to this time we have accustomed ourselves to consider God's grace as our all in all, we must now for a time be content to consider God's *promise* of grace as sufficient for us. But so far is this from implying that our certainty necessarily *must* fail us, that, on the contrary, it then often rises victoriously to greater heights. For we may be driven to embrace the Word with redoubled devotion, now that we are prompted to this not only by the truth and power of the

Word itself, but also by former experiences of its saving grace. Nay, at the very times when we do not have the slightest consciousness of God's help and grace, when, on the contrary, everything seems to go wrong, it often happens in some strange way that we become "cheerful in the faith," certain that the Lord is preparing "greater things" for us.

But it may also happen that the certainty of faith, instead of rising to greater heights, may sink, may even utterly fail, when the *experience* of the joy of salvation ceases for a time. In falling down from the plane of happy experiences, it is possible for us to fall, as it were, "through" the Word. The Word seems to break beneath us. We are no longer able to cling to it and rest upon it; we grope about amidst fears and doubts. The Psalmist has lost more than "the certainty based on experience," when he cries: "The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in dark places, as those that have been long dead," (Ps. 143: 3). The certainty based upon *the truth of the Word* has also partly failed him; otherwise he could not rightly lament that he dwelled in dark places, "as those that have

been long dead." And, indeed, doubly dark are those dark places to him who formerly walked in the light of the Lord!

In this darkness the threats of the law and the words of condemnation loom up unnaturally huge, and spread their shadow over the promises of grace. Heaven is closed against us with a thousand locks; and God's Word is aimed against us with a thousand leveled lances. "The comforter that should refresh my soul is far from me," (Lam. 1: 16). And there sits the poor soul in utter darkness! For he was more certain of his salvation than of anything else in the world; but now he knows not where to turn, he doubts all things, and he is thrown into utter confusion. He cries in his distress that he never has believed, that he never took his soul's salvation seriously, that it was all a sham. And to add to his misery and anguish the world heaps scorn upon him: "Mine adversaries reproach me, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42: 10).

Such, then, are the lapses in the certainty of faith, caused by trials and afflictions. Surely, the times grow serious when the soul of a believer, as Luther says, "is tossed about upon the angry waves of despair and mockery." It

would not be so bad if these lapses in certainty were rare and exceptional. We would not then need to give them much notice; we could, at any rate, dismiss them with a word of explanation as to their origin. But such is by no means the case. The lapses caused by afflictions and trials are so frequent that there is scarcely any believer that *wholly* escapes them; and so interwoven are they in the very essence of the certainty of faith that the more perfect and complete a person's faith is, the more he will, as a rule, have to suffer from trials and afflictions.

*If, therefore, afflictions are not to become an evidence against the stability of the certainty of faith, it must be capable of proof that they form organic links in the very certainty of faith itself.* It is not enough to explain in general terms that they derive their origin from human weakness and shortsightedness; for, if such were the case, why are then the greatest champions of faith the most afflicted? It must be capable of proof that afflictions are an integral part of the certainty of faith and that they have a useful mission to perform for the certainty of faith. Only then do they fully constitute organic links in the certainty of faith itself.

And this *is* capable of proof. The transitory

uncertainty of afflictions actually has a preserving and strengthening effect upon the certainty of faith. They serve to stimulate the life with God. As Luther frequently declares, they arouse "a valorous wrath against Satan," strengthen our yearning for our heavenly home and supply us with greater powers of resistance against outward difficulties. It is self-evident, then, that whatever promotes the *life* of faith must also promote the certainty of faith. But in addition to this, afflictions have a more direct bearing on the certainty of faith. In many cases they are the vital requisite for certainty itself. It is this direct and vital significance of afflictions that I now desire to enlarge upon.

The matter may be briefly stated as follows:

When the Word is believed and embraced, sooner or later, as we have seen, peace and joy will fill the heart! and this personal experience of peace enters as a link into the certainty of faith. But if this sweet sense of peace and joy were permitted to dwell undisturbed in the heart, what would then happen? Then these pleasant emotions would simply develop into temptations to us. For every inner experience of grace has the peculiar double nature of being, indeed, a fruit of the grace from above,

but also a fruit produced in our own emotional natures. It may, therefore, easily happen that we begin by trusting in grace — then in the effects of grace upon our feelings, and finally we end by relying on our feelings alone. The grace, which through inner experience became as one with our nature, ends by being swallowed up in our nature. Thus we find ourselves on an inclined plane. If we allow ourselves to glide down its length, we will at last fall from grace; for it is, of course, just as reprehensible for a child of God to rely upon his own feelings as to rely upon his own good works.

After all, the human heart is a strangely perverted and intricate thing! When God confirms us in our possession of saving grace by granting us an experience of the abundance of *his* riches, we lightly pervert this experience and come to believe that we are rich in ourselves. And thereby we sustain the loss of participation in grace. For that which originally gave us a right to grace, was simply our poverty in the spirit. If we imperil this spiritual poverty by misusing our experiences of grace, we have no longer part or share in this grace and then all certainty of salvation becomes mere fancied certainty.

What, then, must God do to save us from this? He must deprive us of our sweet experiences before we have had time to misuse them. He must check our speed on the inclined plane and lift us back upon the right foundation. He must make our experiences of grace capricious, not because *he* is capricious, but because he is faithful. Viewed superficially, it was, perhaps, a downfall on our part, or the evanescent nature of our feelings that all at once caused the "sweet experiences" to disappear; but back of all this appeared the wisdom of God's fostering care. His faithfulness had not been able to withhold from us the experiences of grace as soon as we rightly believed the Word; but his faithfulness could still less permit us to retain these experiences when we through them were in danger of falling from grace. Rather, then, a fall from certainty than a fall from grace! And that is what actually happened. The pleasing experiences, the "soaring visions" withdrew from our heart. The Lord seemed lost to us. We seemed to have slipped, or to have been hurled from the loving arms of God. Darkness encompassed us anew. God's unshakeable Word, it is true, was immediately on hand to aid us, but we were not on

hand to receive its aid. Our heart had become perverted by sweet experiences, as a child by sweetmeats, and the dry Word was not pleasing to our taste. Then came doubts, and defiance, and storms of afflictions of all kinds. For a time all certainty of faith seemed, as it were, blown away. We stood again where we had stood before the certainty of faith was kindled in our hearts. The main pillars of our faith were tottering, and chaos reigned in our inmost soul. Wearily we had to fight our way to light and peace again; and the way was the same way as before. We fled to the Word, and the Word spoke to us with the same firmness, authority, and divine power as of old. It demanded faith, and created the faith it demanded. Now as of old it declared: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and we felt that we were no less poor in spirit now in the midst of temptations and trials, than when we for the first time knocked on the portals of grace. Again, then, our spiritual poverty became our spiritual right to grace. Our conscience accused us; but at the same time it compelled us to believe in the great freedom from condemnation that is in Christ Jesus. We took courage and clung to the Word; and certainty was restored to us —

first as a "certainty based on the Word;" then, in God's good time, as a certainty resting upon new experiences of the Word's sweetness and power.

The above is a general outline of the relations between certainty of faith and afflictions. These relations differ in almost infinite variety and coloring, but the fundamental principle underlying them is always the same.

Paul has briefly expressed this relationship when he says: "And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch," (2 Cor. 12: 7).

I do not know if this "thorn in the flesh," this "messenger of Satan" was an affliction. But I *do* know that every affliction is like such a "messenger of Satan" that appears at the very moment when either the soaring visions are about to tempt us to pride, or the sweet experiences are about to tempt us to a sense of false security; — and I *know* that God himself has this "messenger of Satan" in his power.

Through this we are able to understand why the greatest champions of faith are the very

ones who have the greatest afflictions. It is simply because the greater the faith, the greater becomes the experience of grace—this experience, as we have seen, begins with “sweet feelings” and rises to “soaring visions.” But the greater these experiences become, the greater also becomes the temptation to pride oneself on them and to misuse them. Then God suddenly puts a stop to these experiences. He who in faith was “caught up even to the third heaven,” must now contend with a thorn in the flesh as a reminder of the truth that he is but dust; and in this reminder is again to be found the germ of new certainty, springing up from faith in the Word, and confirmed by experience.

How, then, are we to regard afflictions? Not as an evidence against the stability of the certainty of faith, but as an evidence of God's fostering love, and consequently a new evidence of the truth and reality of salvation.

*Afflictions suspend the certainty of faith in order to preserve us in grace, which is the foundation and source of certainty.*

*Afflictions check us in our career in order to bring us constantly back to the firm rock on*

*which certainty rests, namely, the compulsion of conscience in relation to God's Word.*

Afflictions drive us to a wholesome repetition of the A-B-C's of faith. For every time we pass through the often mentioned series of experiences: our own spiritual poverty; the Word's divine authority; surprise at the fact that the Word of grace is proffered to the poor in spirit; gratitude for grace in full reliance on the Word; and the experience of grace effected through the Word, — every time we pass through these experiences, certainty becomes more deeply and firmly rooted in our soul.

“God plays a desperate game with his children!” So one of the great witnesses of God declares. And how true it is! But the most desperate game of all that God plays with his own is this: He permits us to experience the Word's power in order to confirm the Word; then again he deprives us of this experience in order to bring us back to the Word. This desperate game often has the appearance of being contradictory to the certainty of faith, but in reality it is a fundamental and vital requisite of certainty.

It is well to be able to show this to “them that are without,” in order that neither “spot

or wrinkle" may adhere to our faith; but it is still better for us to remember this, when times of affliction are at the door. For the best help in bearing up under our afflictions is to know them for what they are, namely, as integral parts in the nature and growth of faith.

Never think, therefore, that something unusual is taking place when you are afflicted. For just as the world's opposition to faith is a normal condition in the life of faith, even though such opposition to the true believers manifests itself in varying degrees of frequency and intensity; so likewise periodic afflictions enter as normal conditions into the life that God has ordained for his children on earth. On the first occasion after his resurrection that Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, he vanished from their sight at the very moment when "their eyes were opened, and they knew him," (Luke 24: 31). This has ever since been the Lord's way to foster his disciples. Do not, then, become irresolute and despondent when the Lord hides himself. Nor should you seek to the right or to the left for specious assistance. Rather convert the uncertainty caused by your afflictions into a new evidence of your own poverty in the spirit, and convert your poverty

in the spirit into a new proof of your right to grace; then fight your way to a firm hold on the Word through all the hosts of conflicting and accusing voices. Hold fast to the Word with something of faith's defiance! As for the rest, remain quiet at the threshold of the house of God, until He again leads you in to the feast of "good things" He has prepared for you. (Ps. 84: 10, 11.) In this way you will the sooner emerge from afflictions; and in this way you will be enabled to preserve a deep and tranquil certainty in the very midst of afflictions. The heaven of certainty will then extend its bright and radiant vault high above all the storm clouds of affliction.

The tide of feelings rises and falls. But certainty abides. For amidst all the vicissitudes of life the truthfulness and faith-generating authority of God's Word are "a kingdom that cannot be shaken," and consequently, certainty's eternal and firm foundation.

Our certainty of faith is, therefore, firm and stable, and of the highest intrinsic value. It rests upon the mightiest influence in our personality: the voice of conscience declaring, "I cannot do otherwise; the Word's truth constrains me." It rests also upon the most pre-

cious experience in our personal lives: the experience that the Word which put me under compulsion to believe, did not prove deceitful when it was believed. —

Consequently, under normal conditions the certainty of faith has a twofold foundation and source. It is upborne both by the Word and by experience; but not always to the same degree by both. Sometimes the Word gains ascendancy over experience; when this happens, certainty assumes the character of a rash venture on the part of conscience — “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” At other times experience gains the upper hand over the Word; when this occurs, certainty appears in the guise of materialized blissful feelings — “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved,” (Gen. 32: 30). But in either case the certainty of faith rests upon the same firm foundation; for in both cases the certainty is upborne by the same divine power of truth. The Word is this power in the bud; *it* operates on the conscience. Experience is this power in bloom and fruition; *it* embraces the entire personality.

The Word and experience are constantly intermingling so long as we remain on earth.

Never do they *wholly* coincide in this life; never can they *wholly* dispense with each other.

Perhaps the interrelation between the Word and experience may best be illustrated by a metaphor based upon the story of Jacob's dream.

A child once asked a bishop who was catechizing a class: "Why did the angels need a ladder when they have wings?" To answer this question may be difficult enough, but to learn a lesson from it is easy. The angels were supported partly by the ladder and partly by their wings. Every Christian will discover the same twofold necessity in his own case, when he begins to examine the foundations of his faith.

The Word is the ladder reaching up to heaven ;  
Experiences are the wings.

As we mount toward heaven, we need the sure support of the Word's ladder, for that is the foundation upon which every experience rests. We need also the wings of experience, for by them is the soul confirmed in its belief that the Word's ladder is a ladder reaching up to heaven. Not before we have stepped upon the first round of the ladder, do the "wings" begin to grow. By aid of the wings we then mount round by round higher and higher. But

the wings tempt us to fly away from this ladder reaching to heaven and thereby, also, from the way to heaven. But as we launch forth, the wings fail us; alone, they are not strong enough to bear us up. With drooping, broken wings we again seek refuge on heaven's ladder. And there, *on the ladder*, the broken wings are healed. New wing feathers grow out; we mount a round or two higher on the ladder and again begin to think ourselves strong enough to dispense with the ladder and fly alone. But again our wings grow feeble and fail us; and we have had another lesson in the advantages and blessings of the Word's strong ladder.

And so it goes on with frequent repetition. Outwardly, our certainty of faith seems constantly shifting and tottering, but to the sincere in heart it is as immovable as the everlasting rock. When we fall from the ladder, the wings bear us up; when our wings droop and fail, the ladder is our support. Both bear us ever upward; slowly and heavily at times, because of our little faith, but faster and more vigorously, the better we learn to understand that the wings were given us only to assist in mounting the ladder, not to forsake the ladder and fly on our own ways. For the ladder is the

straight way to heaven. Therefore it leads us all the way to heaven. What is said of Jacob's ladder is fully applicable to the Word's ladder: "the top of it reached to heaven." Only to heaven's portals does the ladder extend, for there the soul becomes full-fledged, and the certainty of faith reaches its last and completing stage: *fulfillment*.

But can we speak of "faith" in connection with fulfillment? We can — so sure as faith is *certainty*.

If, as the world holds, Christian faith is but a reasonable and probable assumption, or an uncertain possibility, then fulfillment would be the death of faith; for an uncertain possibility cannot be identified with a visible reality. But as faith, as to its inmost nature and power, by no means is an uncertain possibility, but a firm assurance, it abides even when fulfillment is attained. So Paul declares: "But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three," (1 Cor. 13: 13).

In another passage, to be sure, Paul speaks of faith and fulfillment as contrasts, when he exclaims: "We walk by faith, not by sight." But in this there is no contradiction.

Faith remains in fulfillment, provided certainty remains. Faith *is followed* by fulfillment, provided the nature of certainty is altered.

This latter is what takes place. Certainty takes on a new and higher nature. And the change is briefly this, that in fulfillment faith no longer needs the support of the Word, because it has become one with the Word.

Gone forever, in the world to come, are all the sealed mysteries, all the unredeemed promises for whose solving and fulfillment God's Word here was our great guarantee. The mysteries are solved, the promises fulfilled. We know fully, even as we are fully known, (1 Cor. 13: 12). In the light of eternity the ransomed mortal's knowledge of God will correspond to God's knowledge of man. Just as little as God in his present relation to us needs the support of a word whose authority and veracity compels his belief in unsolved mysteries and unredeemed promises, just so little do we in the world of fulfillment need such a word.

"Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." But then when all things are accomplished — then shall God's Word pass away, even as the promise

ceases in fulfillment. Then will be blotted out the sin which in the beginning disturbed the relation between God's creative Word and the world created by God; and the world will then be ruled and ordered in both great and little things by the *saving Word*, which brings to complete actuality the intent and purpose of God's *creative Word*. Life in the world to come will, therefore, be a life of uninterrupted experiences of salvation without shadow or discord. Salvation fills every heart; salvation is present to every eye. The glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters the bottom of the sea. The glory of the Lord lightens the city with the brightness of seven suns. God now is all in all. Experience transcends hope; experience is one with the Word.

From all this, two important conclusions with regard to the certainty of faith may be drawn.

In the certainty of faith there is no longer room for "rash ventures" on the part of conscience; nor is there room for the onset of afflictions.

"Rash ventures" on the part of conscience are debarred; for there is no Word of divine authority without its corresponding experience.

The onset of afflictions is debarred; for there

is no longer a possibility of misusing experiences and of being carried away from the Word.

Certainty of faith now reposes wholly and fully in the bliss of experience fully attained.

If there can be any question as to the existence of doubts in such a certainty of faith, these doubts must necessarily arise from a distinctly opposite horizon. *Here* on earth doubts arise from the horizon of trials and bereavements; *there* they arise from the horizon of abounding bliss. *Here* all doubts and afflictions arise from the occasional absence of faith's outward nearness and sweet experiences; *there* all doubts (if they can be called doubts) arise from the fact that faith's experiences are so transcendently rich and full that we scarcely dare believe in our own happiness. The words of the Psalmist are fulfilled on us: "When Jehovah brought back those that returned from Zion, *we were like unto them that dreamed*," (Ps. 126: 1). Standing by "the river of the water of life . . . proceeding out of the throne of God," we are, indeed "like unto them that dreamed!" At the same time that we are filled with wonder over the possibility of salvation, we are overwhelmed by the completeness of its fulfillment.

This blissful wonder, which is inseparably

connected with the state of perfect blessedness, plays the same role in the world of fulfillment as the onset of afflictions plays in this world.

The onset of afflictions drives us back to the compulsion of conscience in its relation to the Word, and in so doing keeps faith's tender sprout fresh and vigorous; for, as we have seen, the Word's compulsion over the conscience is the first tender *sprout* of Christian faith.

Our blissful wonder drives us with renewed power ever deeper into a living experience of salvation, and in so doing keeps the fruit of faith fresh and sound: for, as we have also seen, a living experience of salvation is the *fruit* of Christian faith.

Doubts originating in trials and afflictions taught us to believe *without seeing*.

Doubts originating in abounding bliss teach us to believe *what we see*.

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## APPENDIX.

Perhaps some of my readers wonder why baptism has not been mentioned in the foregoing discussion. Perhaps, even, some of them will maintain that thereby the most essential element in the certainty of faith has been omitted, in so far as they hold that baptism is the foundation stone upon which alone spiritual life and Christian certainty rest. It is for the purpose of obviating unnecessary controversy with regard to this that I am adding this appendix.

When I failed to make mention of baptism in the foregoing discussion, it was not because I personally think slightingly of baptism. For I, too, maintain, according to the testimony of Scripture, that in baptism man is born anew to life and communion with God, and that man's salvation depends upon that he faithfully continues in his baptismal covenant. We are agreed, then, that in baptism something takes place that is fundamental for our salvation. But thereby is not implied that baptism is fundamental for our *certainty* of salvation. For

then only can baptism make us *certain* of salvation when we beforehand are certain that baptism is a divine act of grace, and that the promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation is firm and unshakable on the part of God.

What, then, will make us certain of this?

The visible element in baptism cannot, from the very nature of the case, do this. Consequently it must be the *Word* in the sacrament that does it. The Word spoken in baptism, or rather the combined testimony of the Scriptures and the Church regarding baptism, must possess, for those who base their Christian certainty upon baptism, such convincing power, that it compels their conscience to believe in baptismal grace and to rest secure in that grace. But by this means do we not in reality return to the same foundation for certainty which I have advocated in my previous discussion, namely, the power of the Word of truth over the conscience of him who is a lover of truth? The whole difference, strictly speaking, is only this: Some experience the truth and power of the Word more strongly when the Scriptures and the Church together bear witness of the baptismal covenant; others experience the truth and power of the Word more strongly when the Word

itself in a general way testifies of a sinner's salvation in Christ Jesus. But that difference is incidental and by no means fundamental. It is very similar to the difference that always exists among true Christians: *one* divine promise seems greatest to the one, another to the other.

The foundation for Christian certainty which baptism presents is therefore, not coordinate with the Word, but derived from the Word. This explains why I purposely refrained from mentioning baptism in the foregoing discussion.

There is naturally nothing to hinder a Christian in his practical life from stating the matter as follows: "It is my baptism and the Lord's covenant with me in baptism which assures me of salvation." But it must not be forgotten that the certainty that God is the God of my salvation, and that in baptism God enters into a covenant with me, ultimately rests not upon the baptismal act and observance, but upon the Word of truth entrusted to the Church of God. If this distinction were firmly maintained, much unnecessary controversy among Christian brethren might be obviated.

















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